

Fashion crisis. Man trouble. Good bitching session. What do they all have in common? They're good reasons to call up your best female buddy for a natter/advice/a spot of one-sided defamation of someone you both hate. As every girl knows, men may come and go but friends stick with you through thick and thin. Or do they? The concept of a friend for life is not a given these days and many female friendships are increasingly faltering and sometimes grinding to a bitter halt. The result can be as devastating as a break-up says **Sinéad Gleeson**.

A few months back we did a piece on the 'quarter life crisis' which suggested that for all their independence and the control they have on their lives, women are more insecure than ever. Even if you've got the looks, the job, the guy, you still get pissed off - and who's the nearest (and handiest) person to blame? One of your closest pals of course.

When I mentioned that I was writing this article to various women, I was amazed at the amount who said: "Oh I've had one of those." We all know that friendships, like relationships, can run their course and people can drift apart often over a long period of time. But it's not always that black and white and a lot of people I spoke to talked about an intense friendship that goes down the tubes very quickly - and often for no apparent reason. What's worse is that although we're all more educated, well-travelled and career-minded than previous generations, it still seems that it's not enough to keep the green eyed monster from the door.

Friendships go off the rails for lots of reasons. Maybe you've become different people or just don't have much in common any more. What merits attention here are friendships that fall asunder even though nothing has really changed. You're both the same people, but one person doesn't feel the same. It's almost like the relationship thing where one day, you just wake up and you feel differently about a person that used to mean so much to you. The friend you once had an unbelievable connection with is now cold and distant with you.

Why?

The reasons are often complex, but there's a lot of overlap and a definite pattern. Ann-Marie explains what happened to her. "I met this friend through a media event we were both helping out with as we both worked in marketing. We had lots in common, socialised together and hung out in each other's flats a lot. We talked all the time and had so much fun together. After

we'd been close friends for about three years, I got I got offered a job in PR, which is something we both wanted to do.

"Almost immediately, I noticed the frostiness. She would put me down in front of other friends, constantly try to outdo me and it got to the point that I dreaded being around her. When I tried to confront her about what was happening, she reluctantly (and unconvincingly) apologised but things didn't change. I tried several times over the course of a few months to talk about things but she avoided me and never admitted that she was jealous.

"I'm a more confident person and I knew she had hang-ups about stuff. I tried to explain that we were friends and that there was enough room for us both to be successful while supporting the other person, but she just couldn't handle it and said that she felt threatened by me. At the root of it, she resented me for doing well. Because of the way she handled things, our friendship was irreparably damaged and I don't see her any more except at the occasional launch, which I'm glad about now."

Rivalry

Before I go on, it's worth mentioning that I am loathe to perpetuate the gender stereotype of women as bitches, who like nothing better than slagging off other women and getting into catfights. This is about genuine friendships and the real hurt caused when they don't work out. It's also about one person feeling inadequate, who may project their issues on to someone else.

It doesn't seem to happen in male/female friendships because there is a very different bond between women. Irish Psychotherapist and Counsellor Dr Catherine Keers has this to say: "Female friendships tend to

be more emotionally intense, and this of course would also apply to friendships that happen to cross over into the workplace, like the story above. The relationship between two close friends is often similar to what exists between siblings - as a result a lot more issues can get acted out in female relationships. In turn, this can bring about rivalry with echoes back to sibling rivalry and emotional needs not being met in childhood - like feeling less clever, pretty, loveable etc than a sister or friend."

When love turns to hate

The hardest part of a disintegrating friendship to comprehend is when you don't feel that you've done anything wrong. You're still you, but all of a sudden someone who used to love you, can't stand you. Often the things that first endeared you to them are the things that they come to resent about you, as Ciara knows: "I've always been a larger than life person, I'm a practical joker, very loud and I always make people laugh. I had a friend from down

home who I shared a flat with in college in Dublin. I suppose we were opposites, I'm big and loud, she's petite and refined. I made her laugh constantly, we were out all the time, had big chats late into the night, that kind of stuff.

"After college we were still close but doing different things with our lives. We were part of a big gang, all from the country, who hung out in Dublin and still kept in touch. I noticed that when the gang were all out together, she seemed irritated with me. I'd have everyone in stitches and she'd appear to be fuming. I even thought I was imagining it at first until she confronted me in the toilets on a night out.

"She literally had a fit and told me I always monopolised everyone's attention and never shut up. I was so hurt

The DOS and DON'TS of a failing friendship

- DO** tell your friend about how you honestly feel if things are weird.
- DO** try and salvage things - good pals are hard to find.
- DO** try and talk it out rather than have a fight.
- DO** remind yourself that it could be HER issue.
- DON'T** beat yourself up if you know you haven't done anything wrong.
- DON'T** avoid each other and never confront the fact that your friendship's in trouble.
- DON'T** be afraid to walk away from someone who just isn't good for you to be around.
- DON'T** let someone else's negativity dent your own self-confidence.